

Bexar County's Head Start Dental Screenings Program

Dental caries, commonly known as tooth decay, is the most common chronic disease of children ages 5-17 years old. It is a preventable disease that can lead to persistent pain, infection, compromised nutritional intake, difficulty sleeping and reduced self-esteem. The CDC estimates that more than 51 million school hours are lost each year due to dental-related illness. Children and adolescents living in poverty are disproportionately affected by dental disease. It is a widely known fact that 80% of tooth decay is found in only 20% of children. Fluoridated community water systems and school-based sealant programs are proven strategies to eliminate oral health disparities.

In 2005, San Antonio Metropolitan Health District dentists provided more than 12,000 on-site dental screenings to roughly 6,500 Head Start enrollees in Bexar County. Children from households with a family income at or below 133% of poverty meet the eligibility requirements for Head Start. The following table presents the data collected and compiled from the screening process from 2001 through 2005 for enrollees between the ages 3 to 5.

The dental screening does is not meant to replace of an examination conducted in a dental office. Certain cavities, such as those between teeth can only be detected through a comprehensive examination that includes x-rays. In consideration of the information presented below, it must be noted that the purpose of the screening process is to provide parents and guardians a general overview of the child's oral health and to facilitate treatment of identified disease. Children are referred for further evaluation and treatment to San Antonio Metropolitan Health District Dental Clinics, UT/Ricardo Salinas Dental Clinic, private practitioners and others. community partners.

	Visible Signs of Decay	No Visible Sign of Decay	No History of Caries*	TOTAL Screenings
2005	1,908 (15.5%)	10,393 (84.5%)	7,631	12,301
2004	2,075 (18.1%)	9,397 (81.9%)	7,232	11,472
2003	2,258 (20.3%)	8,884 (79.7%)	6,841	11,142
2002	2,834 (26.9%)	7,711 (73.1%)	5,919	10,545
2001	1,969 (31.4%)	4,299 (68.6%)	3,218	6,268
Totals	11,044	40,684	30,841	51,728

**The category "No History of Caries" indicates the child has no visible signs of decay and no signs of previous treatment (fillings, crowns and/or missing teeth) at the time of screening.*